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5 Signs Your Workout Regimen Needs More Recovery

Does your busy practice have you skipping workouts and missing the gym? If you're pumped to get back in the action, that's great! Just be sure that you ease back in.

When you're excited and eager to make up for lost time, it can be easy to overtrain. More isn't necessarily better, because stress is cumulative. "A good workout is a measured dose of stress," says Stefan Underwood, vice president of continuous improvement at Exos. But too much stress can lead to problems.

Something will happen. You'll get hurt. You'll be tired. You'll have less desire to train. "The body will always win," says Underwood, adding that rather than overtraining, the problem can be under-recovering. There are five common signs that you need to take it easier, and while they're all intertwined they also have their own traits. Here's a look at what they're reflecting and what to do.

1. Your appetite is decreasing.

Overtraining can increase stress hormones, such as cortisol, which affects the nervous system and can slow digestion. Stress also lowers hunger hormones. Taken together, your metabolic rate and appetite go down, says performance dietitian Paige Crawford.

So what can you do? Crawford recommends eating lean protein and adding in colorful fruits and vegetables for the micronutrients and antioxidants that help with the oxidative stress from training. Finish off your meal or snack with whole-grain carbohydrates. And stay hydrated.

But as with your workouts, Crawford says that you want to assess how you feel throughout the day. If you have ample energy, enough to consistently hit 7s and 8s for your workout, you're eating well. And if you're doing that, what you consume before or after your training, in general, requires less precision.

2. You're moody.

Since your nervous system is affected, so is your emotional regulation. Any issue that you're trying to deal with can be that much harder. Underwood says to take five to 10 minutes at the start of the day and put together a plan. Stress can come from surprises, but you'll feel more prepared with even a three-item to-do list, and having a goal can channel your energy and lift your mood.

A lack of variety in your workout hurts as well. If you're having trouble getting in the right mood for a workout, add something fun like juggling, handstands, or anything you normally wouldn't do in order to shift your focus. "It does a fantastic job in drawing you into the present. Your mind isn't wandering," Underwood says.

Two breathing practices can also help. One is cadence breathing, which lengthens the exhale, engages the parasympathetic nervous system, and helps decrease anxiety. Inhale for six counts, hold for four, and exhale for 10. You can also do it in a four-two-six split. Another method is [box breathing, for which](#) you inhale, hold, exhale, and hold for the same count. Think of a square, but the exhale still gets priority. Underwood suggests doing this for about 20 minutes total over the course of a day, but it's particularly helpful for three to five minutes right before bed, since another symptom of moodiness is sleep disruption (more on that below).

3. You're not sleeping well.

Emotional stress can play a role, but chronically training too hard affects your hormones, resting heart rate, and breathing. Along with being tired, sleep is when your body repairs and allows you to train optimally. A lack of sleep also compromises your metabolic and nervous systems, affecting your mood and ability to focus, which increases the risk of injury, Underwood says.

The above breathing exercises can help, but the often-suggested sleep hygiene recommendations still hold true.

- Be consistent with your bedtime.
- Dim the lights 30 to 60 minutes before bed to produce melatonin and avoid screens with blue lights that cause arousal.
- Maintain a dark, cool room since body temperature can wake you up.
- If you can't sleep, get out of bed so you don't associate the two things.
- Keep a notepad by the bed. Writing down lingering thoughts gets them out of your head and helps form tomorrow's plan, allowing you to wake up with some momentum.

4. You're excessively sore.

Aches come with training, but Underwood says that pain should feel good. There are two kinds that don't. One is mechanical, or delayed onset muscle soreness, in which micro-tears aren't repairing and can make something like taking stairs difficult. Take a foam roller or lacrosse ball and use broad sweeping strokes on the areas to increase circulation. A walk or light bike ride can do the same, as well as carry nutrients through the body and flush out waste.

The other type of pain, a response to neural stress, involves having something like knots or tight hamstrings. Take the same foam roller or lacrosse ball and hang out with some pressure on the hot spots without burrowing into them. Breathe. Underwood also suggests finding a way to smile to avoid tensing up. After that, you want to start to move your body through its full range of motion.

5. You're low on energy or don't feel like training.

Even if you're not feeling sore, there are still days when a workout is the last thing you want to do. That's because when your nervous system is depressed, your body feels lethargic. Look at your nutrition, sleep, and hydration.

A simple formula is to drink one-half to one ounce of water per pound of body weight daily. Sweating is a factor, but check your urine over the course of the day. If it doesn't become lighter, you need more fluid, says Crawford.

When you're training with your normal energy, Underwood recommends writing down your workload and perceived exertion. You'll have a baseline and be able to say, for example, "165 feels heavy, and that's not usually the case." More than merely being aware, you can use your notes to show you a trend that you can correct.

The other thing to do is to rate how hard the overall workout was. "You don't need to smash yourself," Underwood says. You want to balance a couple of weekly 10s with 7s and 8s. Any score is subjective, but, as a gauge, Underwood says, "I like it when people walk out feeling an inch taller," he says.

When you're sluggish, skipping a week can be restorative, but, if that's too much, do light cardio or something else physical, such as basketball or yoga, where the goal isn't reps and quantity. When you return, you'll have more energy and a clearer head.